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Autosegmental association is not automatic

The classical autosegmental analysis of liaison (typically French, but also English: a[n] apple vs. a[ø] coffee) supposes that the association of floating consonants is automatic as soon as some constituent is available (the /-t/ of *petit* floats lexically and hooks on the empty onset of following V-initial words). We intend to show that this assumption is wrong: association of floating consonants in French is subjected to an explicit order that involves a choice.

The non-automaticity of association follows from the existence of liaison without enchaînement (Encrevé 1988). This variety of liaison is optional and characteristic for journalistic and political speech. The floating consonant is phonetically realised, but separated from the beginning of the following V-initial word by a clearly marked pause. The obvious analysis, then, is that it "stays home", i.e. does not wander into the onset of the following word. This is also confirmed by the optional realisation of a glottal stop in this onset: *un peti[t] ?enfant* [liaison without enchaînement].

If this is true, however, the floating consonant must associate to skeletal material that is *lexically* present in its home-word: we know from the behaviour of other floating melodic items that skeletal slots do not fall from heaven. For example, there is no case on record where a floating tone, "wanting" to parachute, creates an "association pressure" that leads to the appearance of an appropriate tone-bearing unit. Floating consonants thus face "their own" constituent in the lexicon just as much as all other segments – except that they are not associated. When a V-initial word follows, then, the speaker makes a choice: either he "decides" to associate the floating consonant to the onset of the following word, or to its home constituent. Since enchaînement and non-enchaînement are a matter of style, association may be said to be under social control here. One may object that this kind of "narrow variation" must not be managed by grammar. We present socio-linguistic arguments in favour of the view that speakers know this kind of variation, which is part of their (passive) competence. Not only linguistic invariants are part of what a speaker knows about his language – he also knows what is a (sociologically conditioned) option and what is not.

Besides this specific view on competence, we present an argument that is unsuspected of narrow socio-linguistic action. It is well known that h-aspiré words in French sometimes appear with a glottal stop (Dell 1985:186): *une grosse housse* may come out as either [gros ?us] or [grosə us] with an epenthetic schwa (non-h-aspiré words do not behave like that: *une grosse ourse* can only be pronounced [gros uχs], not *[gros ?uχs] or - except in Midi French - *[grosə uχs]). Schwa and the glottal stop together, i.e. [grosə ?us], is impossible (outside of emphasis, whose agent is the glottal stop in French). Also, the glottal stop may not appear after V-final words (again: except in emphatic speech): *[la ?us]. The overall context in which the glottal stop appears is thus "post-consonantal", a position that is known for making its host strong (Pagliano 2003). Now there IS a configuration where the glottal stop can appear intervocalically (and in non-emphatic speech): this is when the preceding word ends in an *unpronounced* floating consonant. A masculine h-aspiré word such as *hublot* will inhibit liaison and thus produce *un gros hublot* [gro yblo]. But here, [gro ?yblo] is possible (and non-emphatic). By contrast, if the preceding word is phonetically V-final as well but unlike *gros* does not end in a floating consonant, the glottal stop is banned: *le hublot* [lə yblo], *[lə ?yblo].

This means that the glottal stop in [gro ?yblo] can appear (in the initial onset of *hublot*) because it stands in post-consonantal position – even if the consonant in question, the floating /-s/ of *gros*, is phonetically absent. Syllable structure is not calculated on the grounds of melodic items, but in regard of syllabic material. It must therefore be concluded that *gros* [gro] ends in a consonantal *position* even when no consonant is heard. This is precisely what we have claimed earlier on the grounds of liaison without enchaînement.

Our overall result, then, is the idea that much floating melodic material associates to syllabic constituents only upon explicit order. This order may have different origins: morphology, style or phonology. In the former case, association is an actual morpheme: this is the typical situation in Semitic templatic morphology where the identity of a template is the existence of an order (e.g. "associate C_2 to an additional position (= geminate it)!"), but also the case of the French feminine of adjectives: masc. *il est gros* [gro] vs. fem *elle est grosse* [gros]: "associate the floating consonant!"). Sociology (or style) commands in liaison without enchaînement, while phonological rule alone regulates vowel-zero alternations: these may be viewed as lexically floating melodies that are associated to their "home constituent" in a certain phonological configuration (we expose this view on the matter in greater detail).